

STATEMENT OF SAMUEL K. SKINNER
NOMINEE FOR U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
JANUARY 26, 1989

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, IT IS A PLEASURE FOR ME TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU THIS MORNING ON THE OCCASION OF MY NOMINATION TO BE THE TENTH SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION. I AM HONORED THAT PRESIDENT BUSH HAS ASKED ME TO SERVE IN HIS CABINET AND, IF CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE, I INTEND TO WORK VERY HARD TO JUSTIFY HIS FAITH IN ME. I AM EAGER TO RETURN FULL TIME TO PUBLIC SERVICE AND TO EARN THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE I WILL SERVE. MR. CHAIRMAN, I WILL KEEP MY REMARKS BRIEF, MENTIONING JUST A FEW ITEMS OF CONCERN TO ME SO THAT I MIGHT ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU OR MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE MAY HAVE.

AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CHICAGO REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY OF NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS, I AM AWARE OF MANY OF THE CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSPORTATION AREA. IT WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK TO MEET OUR VITAL, AND GROWING, TRANSPORTATION NEEDS IN THIS TIME OF FISCAL RESTRAINT. HOWEVER, I ASSURE YOU THAT I WILL ENDEAVOR TO WORK WITH EACH OF YOU TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS WE FACE. IF CONFIRMED, MY PRINCIPLE GOAL, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE CONGRESS, THE PUBLIC AND INDUSTRY, WILL BE TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY THAT ENHANCES OUR PUBLIC SECURITY AND STRENGTHENS OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY.

YOUR COMMITTEE IS THE ARCHITECT AND CONSERVATOR OF THE FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY PROGRAM, ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC WORKS EFFORTS EVER UNDERTAKEN. IT SERVES AS A MODEL FOR COOPERATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN THE STATES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. THERE HAS BEEN GREAT PROGRESS. THE FEDERAL INTERSTATE SYSTEM IS NEARING COMPLETION AND, BECAUSE OF AN INCREASED FINANCIAL COMMITMENT DURING THE 1980'S, THE DECLINE IN OUR NATION'S HIGHWAY AND BRIDGES HAS LARGELY BEEN ARRESTED. HOWEVER, AS WE ALL REALIZE, URBAN CONGESTION IS INCREASING AND OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES FACE SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS. A MODERN, WELL-MAINTAINED INFRASTRUCTURE OF HIGHWAYS AND BRIDGES IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL TO THIS COUNTRY'S WELL BEING. I AM COMMITTED TO MAKING SURE THAT OUR INVESTMENT IS PRESERVED.

I AM AWARE THAT WE ARE APPROACHING AN IMPORTANT JUNCTURE IN THIS PROGRAM. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT FACE REAUTHORIZATION UNTIL 1991, THE DEBATE AND DISCUSSION OVER THE FUTURE OF THE HIGHWAY PROGRAM HAS ALREADY BEGUN. YOU HAVE MY PLEDGE TO WORK WITH YOU TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE, LONG RANGE PLAN TO DEAL WITH OUR INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY. WHAT IS REQUIRED IS A CAREFUL AND THOUGHTFUL EXAMINATION OF THE LEGITIMATE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE STATES, AND NEW AND EFFICIENT WAYS TO FINANCE THE EXPANDING NEEDS OF OUR NATION'S INFRASTRUCTURE TO ENSURE A GREATER TRANSPORTATION RETURN ON EVERY DOLLAR SPENT. I INTEND TO WORK WITH YOU AND THE TRANSPORTATION COMMUNITY IN THIS EFFORT.

IN THE MEANTIME, I AM COMMITTED TO THE COMPLETION OF THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY PROGRAM. OVER THE LONG-TERM, I AM -- LIKE PRESIDENT BUSH -- COMMITTED TO THE EXPENDITURE OF HIGHWAY TRUST FUNDS FOR THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE INTENDED, WITH ULTIMATE EXPENDITURE OF THE BALANCES AS WE MAKE CONTINUED PROGRESS ON DEFICIT REDUCTION.

I SHARE THIS COMMITTEE'S GREAT CONCERN OVER HIGHWAY SAFETY AND I WILL MAKE IT ONE OF THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES OF MY TENURE AS SECRETARY. SAFETY IS DEPENDENT ON MANY FACTORS INCLUDING HIGHWAY DESIGN, VEHICLE SAFETY STANDARDS AND MAINTENANCE, DRIVER TRAINING, INSPECTIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ELIMINATION OF DRUNK OR DRUGGED DRIVING. THE PRESIDENT AND I ARE COMMITTED TO MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO RID OUR NATION'S HIGHWAYS OF THE DANGER POSED BY DRUGGED OR DRUNK DRIVERS.

ONE IMPORTANT AREA OF MUTUAL INTEREST IS THE NATIONAL MAXIMUM SPEED LIMIT LAW. I PERSONALLY BELIEVE THAT THE STATES ARE IN A BETTER POSITION TO EVALUATE THE MANY FACTORS RELATIVE TO SETTING SPEED LIMITS SUCH AS GEOGRAPHICAL TERRAIN, WEATHER CONDITIONS, TRAFFIC CONGESTION, ACCIDENT STATISTICS AND POLICE RESOURCES. HOWEVER, I AM AWARE THAT THE FIRST OF THREE ANNUAL REPORTS HAS JUST BEEN RELEASED ON THE EFFECT OF THE INCREASE IN THE SPEED LIMIT ON RURAL INTERSTATES. I WILL GIVE CAREFUL AND THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION TO THIS REPORT. I WILL ALSO DEDICATE THE RESOURCES OF THE DEPARTMENT TO AID THE STATES IN MANAGING THEIR LAW ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES TO BETTER ADDRESS THE DANGER OF EXCESSIVE

SPEED. I AM ALSO VERY INTERESTED IN ASSISTING LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS TO RECOGNIZE DRUG-IMPAIRED DRIVERS TO REMOVE THEM FROM OUR ROADWAYS.

I ALSO SHARE THIS COMMITTEE'S COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR MARINE ENVIRONMENT. THE COAST GUARD HAS TWO MAJOR STATUTORY MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION GOALS: TO RESPOND TO OIL POLLUTION INCIDENTS AND PREVENT ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGES THROUGH REGULATION. A PATCHWORK OF DOMESTIC STATUTES AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS FORM THE LEGAL BASIS FOR THE COAST GUARD'S MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS. I AM PART OF AN ADMINISTRATION THAT HAS PLEDGED GREATER ATTENTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, SO I ASSURE YOU THAT I WILL WORK WITH THIS COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE NEED FOR STRONGER MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN AND CONSOLIDATE OIL SPILL LIABILITY AND COMPENSATION TO PROVIDE BETTER PROTECTION FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT AND A FASTER SYSTEM FOR COMPENSATING THE VICTIMS OF OIL POLLUTION. I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR GUIDANCE AND COOPERATION IN THIS IMPORTANT EFFORT.

LET ME CONCLUDE MY STATEMENT BY THANKING YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.